

Iconic CATS about music and movement

Mark Pavilons

You have to admire felines. At least the human variety.
A revival of the second-longest r



ning Broadway musicals of all time ??Cats ? ends its Toronto run Sept. 22.

For the first time in 25 years, this production features an all-Canadian cast of talented ?cats.?

It's not easy to fill the shoes of such an iconic stage production that brought us some of the most famous Andrew Lloyd Webber songs in history. And it's definitely not easy to tell a story without dialogue or narration.

But this young and talented cast pulled it off nicely and gave GTA theatre-goers a rare treat ? to experience one of the best-loved musicals in the intimate Panasonic Theatre. Being rather up close and personal with this presentation made it much more enjoyable. Cats actually scampered through the aisles, engaging the audience.

This is very much an ensemble presentation, characterized by harmony, choreography and near-perfect execution.

Most are experienced dancers and some trained in ballet. It definitely showed, as the movements were smooth and precise. Kudos to Judy Kovacs (Bombalurina), Eric Abel (Alonzo/Coricopat), Christy Adamson (dance captain), Austin Di Iulio (Mistoffelees), Marisa Falcone (Demeter), Kailie Hunter (Tantomile), Neesa Kenemy (Rumpleteazer), Lily McEvenue (Victoria), Jaime Reid (Cassandra), Ashley St. John (Sillabub).

It's a busy stage, with 10-14 actors constantly in a state of action. Even those off to the side are busy preening, stretching and generally fussing about. ?Kudos for the realistic cat qualities ? playing, kneading, bunting, scratching and rolling.

The physical stage parameters were a bit tight and the set, while fittingly grimy and to scale, was perfect.

The play is not about props or special effects. And even the costumes, while colourful and sufficiently cat-like, have to be functional, given the high energy levels by performers.

The makeup and hair were the best qualities, and Rum Tum Tugger's mane was my personal favourite.

Even though this musical is quite simply, all about cats, that's not a bad thing. Not being a cat lover myself, I?was surprised at the level of enjoyment this produced. The entire cast deserves a gentle pat.

While this cast jelled very well, the play allows them all to shine and show off their individual talents.

Several of the characters took their turn in the spotlight with some memorable results.

The song Memory, which debuted in Webber's UK presentation in 1981 is one of the most covered songs ever. It occupied the charts many times, with versions sung by giants like Barbara Streisand, Barry Manilow and Celine Dion. Again, really tough shoes (or vocal chords) to fill.

It's a beautiful song and when delivered by a powerful voice, it's magical.

And Dora Award nominee Ma-Anne Dionisio?did it justice to be sure. The actress who plays Grizabella performed admirably, and maybe even produced a tear or two from the audience. Did I say this was a beautiful song?

She drew praise for her recent role as Kim in Miss Saigon.

Aside from Dionisio's two renditions of Memory, Charles Azulay (Old Deuteronomy), Cory O'Brien (Bustopher Jones, Gus, Growltiger), Martin Samuel (Rum Tum Tugger) and Austin Di?Iulio (Mr. Mistoffelees) were standouts.

I?really enjoyed the introspective monologue presented by old Gus, The Theatre Cat in which he summed up: ?Well, the Theatre's

certainly not what it was.? From T.S. Eliot to the ears of the audience, no it's not. In some ways it's much better.

If you get a chance, see Cats before it closes.

Mirvish Theatres are offering a host of treats in coming weeks. Watch for Les Miserables (begins Sept. 27), Disney's Aladdin (November-December) and the phenomenal Lion King (April 2014).

With lineups like this, and some very talented performers, Toronto is truly a theatre mecca.